NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL

EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS TO MEET CALIFORNIA'S WATER SUPPLY RELIABILITY NEEDS

The Bay-Delta Estuary is facing a crisis. Numerous species are listed as threatened or endangered, or proposed for listing. The Delta smelt is on the verge of extinction. The status quo is not sustainable for any of the Delta's users, including farmers, commercial and sport fishermen, Delta residents and the 23 million Californians who rely on the Delta for a portion of their water supply. Investments to improve water supply reliability must also improve conditions in the Delta. By directing state funds to alternative water supplies, Delta flood protection and restoring a healthy ecosystem, the State will help improve water supply reliability, meet the needs of a growing population and protect imperiled fish species.

There is a broad consensus regarding the most effective tools to meet California's future water supply needs. The 2005 California Water Plan update contains extensive, detailed estimates of the water supply potential of a range of proven water supply tools. The bar chart below presents many of those totals, ranging from low to high yield estimates. We believe that the more ambitious estimates are realistic, and that aggressive targets and ambitious programs are required to assure Californians a reliable water future. DWR estimates that the three tools with the greatest potential – urban water conservation, wastewater recycling and improved groundwater management – could, together, produce more than six million acre-feet of new water. This represents approximately as much water as the CVP and SWP have diverted from the Delta in recent years, and more than enough to reduce Delta diversions and meet future growth needs.

NRDC believes that total Delta diversions must be reduced from the unsustainable record levels in recent years. We are working with other members of the environmental community to develop a science-based target for that reduction, which we will provide to the Task Force in the near future. Urban water use efficiency and other tools discussed below can provide the State with near-term and cost-effective supplies to offset any impacts from a reduction in Delta supplies.

Proven "Cornerstone" Water Supply Reliability Tools

Urban Water Use Efficiency: Currently, urban areas use over eight million acre-feet of water during a typical year. One-third or more of this water is used to irrigate urban landscapes. Urban water use efficiency could yield up to **3,500,000 acre-feet** of water per year according to the Pacific Institute's most recent projections. (This estimate is close to DWR's estimate of 3.1 million acre-foot high estimate of the potential of urban conservation at $230-522 per acre-foot.) Significant reductions in water use can be achieved through design, installation and maintenance of water efficient landscapes, along with indoor conservation measures in the commercial, industrial and residential sectors. These savings can be realized by investing in current, off-the-shelf technologies, reducing lost and unaccounted for water through system water audits, and increasing implementation of conservation pricing. New water efficient technologies will undoubtedly continue to emerge and contribute additional savings in the future.

Recycled Water: Recycling urban wastewater (also known as reclamation or re-use) is an important strategy to increase water supply. Recycled water is most frequently used for agricultural or landscape irrigation or groundwater recharge. DWR estimates water recycling can generate up to **1,500,000 acre-feet a year** by 2030 at average cost of $600 per acre-foot.

Improved Groundwater Management: The Department of Water Resources estimates that improved groundwater management, such as the conjunctive use of surface and underground storage, has the potential to provide between 500,000 and 2 million acre-feet at costs ranging from $10-600. The average cost in a recent round of applications received by DWR for conjunctive use projects was $110 per acre-foot. The appropriate target for conjunctive use will be determined in part by decisions on water management in the Delta, which will influence potential yield from groundwater storage. Such investments are likely to yield greater benefits south of the Delta, where projects may be less constrained by Delta operations and provide greater independence from the Delta. This effort could also be coordinated with floodplain and habitat restoration efforts in the Central Valley.

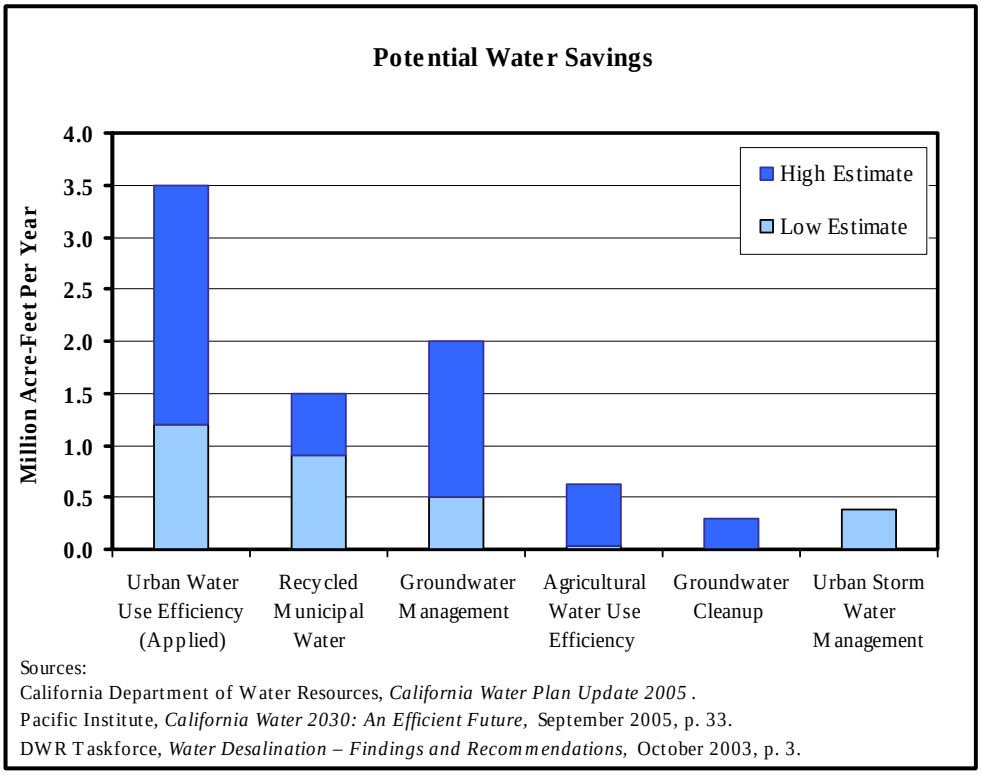
Additional Effective Strategies

In addition to the key tools discussed above, a number of additional water management tools can generate significant additional supplies.

Agricultural Water Use Efficiency: Eighty percent of California's annual water use goes to agriculture. Although in some areas considerable strides have been made in water use efficiency, farming methods are not as water-efficient as they can be. The California Bay-Delta Authority's Year Four report estimates up to **620,000 acre-feet** of water can be saved through agricultural water use efficiency, which includes installing micro-irrigation technology or other water management improvements, at a cost of $242 per acre-foot. We believe that these estimates understate the true potential of this tool.

Additionally, agricultural water is often highly subsidized. Pricing reform that sends clear, meaningful signals to agricultural water users can be very effective in encouraging increased water use efficiency.

Groundwater Clean-up: Removing salts, including nitrates, from groundwater can be a cost-effective means of producing clean water supplies, recharging stressed and contaminated aquifers, and increasing groundwater storage capacity without the need to build expensive surface storage projects. DWR estimates brackish groundwater desalination costs $250-500 per acre-foot, with a potential of yielding up to **290,000 acre-feet per year**.



Sources:
California Department of Water Resources, *California Water Plan Update 2005* .
Pacific Institute, *California Water 2030: An Efficient Future,* September 2005, p. 33.
DWR Taskforce, *Water Desalination – Findings and Recommendations,* October 2003, p. 3.

Urban Storm Water Management: Urban water agencies, particularly in Southern California, are increasingly recognizing the potential to provide multiple benefits by capturing, treating (where necessary), storing and using urban storm water. Use of low impact development techniques (LID) results in the diversion and capture of storm water and dry-weather runoff before it flows into surface waters. This water can then be used on- or off-site as an alternative water source for irrigation of parklands, sporting fields, cluster housing groups, or for fire-fighting. Such projects can provide water supply and flood management benefits, while reducing coastal pollution from urban runoff.

Nationally, research has repeatedly shown that LID has the potential to deliver vast quantities of useable water through recharge and infiltration, and that it is the most effective and cost-efficient means of managing storm water and abating water pollution. Further, LID uses common sense and simple technology – strategically placed beds of native plants, rain barrels, "green roofs," porous surfaces for parking lots and roads, and other tools – to retain rainfall on site or help rainfall soak into the ground, rather than polluting the nearest water body.

The Los Angeles Integrated Regional Water Management Plan indicates that proposed urban storm water management projects can generate **100,000 acre-feet** from urban storm water capture, and that the maximum potential is at least twice that amount. NRDC's preliminary estimate of the water savings from implementation of LID practices suggests that if LID were used in just 50% of all residential and commercial properties in Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Diego Counties, **377,000 acre-feet** annually could be infiltrated or otherwise reused. By offsetting energy-intensive imported water in like amounts, and after accounting for average energy requirements associated with pumping groundwater in these areas, LID could result in the reduction of up to 45,000 metric tons of CO_2 annually in Los Angeles County and an additional 55,000 metric tons of CO_2 in San Diego and Riverside Counties combined.

Transfers and Land Retirement. These tools must be carefully designed in order to avoid impacts to third parties. However, significant land retirement on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley is very likely and can generate significant water savings. For example, the Westlands Water District has advocated a land retirement program of up to 200,000 acres. Farming this land has historically required as much as 700,000 acre-feet of water.

Benefits of Alternative Water Management Strategies

A Healthier Bay-Delta and Other Ecosystems: Investments in surface storage could harm the Bay-Delta ecosystem by reducing flows to the Delta or increasing diversions from the Delta. In contrast, alternative water management tools would decrease our reliance on the Delta.

Energy Savings and Reduced Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Almost 20% of California's electricity use, and over 30% of its non-power plant natural gas use, is associated with the use of water. Water use efficiency and recycling can generate substantial energy savings and reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, and help the State meet AB 32 implementation targets.

Water Quality Benefits: Investing in water efficiency and groundwater cleanup will improve water quality by reducing urban runoff from lawns and gardens. In addition, investments in these tools will also help stretch limited state and federal funds available for water and wastewater treatment facility expansions and upgrades, by delaying or reducing the size of water system expansions. These investments will also improve drinking water quality, particularly for poorer communities in the Central Valley that rely on groundwater.

Reducing the Economic Risk from Delta Levee Failures: A massive levee failure in the Delta could jeopardize a critical water supply for 23 million Californians. Investments in alternative water management tools will reduce reliance on Delta diversions, thereby decreasing the risk to California's economy from potential Delta levee failures.

Strategies to Achieve Maximum Water Savings

This memo focuses on potential targets for a range of water management tools. The bullets below briefly outline key strategies that can maximize the water savings from these tools. We will present more details regarding these and other strategies in the future.

A Clear Conclusion Regarding Delta Diversion Totals: The single most effective thing the Delta Vision Task Force could do to encourage the development of alternative water supplies would be to make a clear, forceful recommendation regarding the need to reduce Delta diversions by a specified amount. Reducing Delta diversions will be a significant change from the trend over the last four decades. The likelihood that we will succeed in this transition will be greatly increased if the state has a clear goal to guide planning efforts and investments.

Learning from California's Energy Efficiency Success: California has emerged as a global leader in energy efficiency. We believe that the policy tools, such as a loading order and public benefits charges that have made this progress possible in the energy arena, can produce similar progress in encouraging water use efficiency. (See NRDC's white paper entitled: *Transforming Water Use: A California Water Efficiency Agenda for the 21st Century*.)

AB 32 Implementation: Reducing Delta diversions and investing in alternatives, such as water conservation, has the potential to significantly reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions. By integrating water planning with energy and climate change efforts, the state can take advantage of the synergies among these issues, including potential additional funding sources for less energy intensive alternatives to Delta diversions.

Integrated Regional Water Management: In recent years, IRWM has emerged as a key strategy to design water management solutions tailored to local needs, by considering local conditions, a full range of water management tools and a broad spectrum of potential benefits.

Credible Economics and Financing: Delta Vision should recommend that state and federal agencies carefully analyze the cost of alternative water supply strategies. Individual water agencies do this as a matter of course. However, state and federal agencies often fail to incorporate adequately basic economic analysis. For example, public funds dedicated to improving water supply reliability should be focused on the most cost-effective environmentally sound tools. The Delta Vision Task Force should develop recommendations to reduce water subsidies (e.g. by reforming renewed CVP contracts) and move toward real "beneficiary pays" financing.